United Nations

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

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Letter of transmittal

10 October 2000

Mr. Secretary-General,

The international community has dealt with the question of Palestine for over five decades. For the past 25 years, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has worked hard to implement in the most effective way the mandate given to it by the General Assembly. The Committee devoted its activities to the full realization by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights — the right to self-determination without external interference; the right to national independence and sovereignty; and the right to return to their homes and property, from which they had been displaced. The Committee reiterates its pledge to continue to work towards the implementation of its important mandate until those rights are fully exercised by the Palestinian people.

Today, on the threshold of the twenty-first century, it is incumbent on the international community to spare no effort in order to assist the Palestinian people in its quest for justice, peace, a better future for their children and economic prosperity. The Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, co-sponsored by the Russian Federation and the United States of America, are now at a critical turning point. We are hopeful that the peace process will result in a final agreement bringing peace, stability and normalcy to the relations between the Israelis and the Palestinians and will lead to a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In this regard, we, in the Committee, highly appreciate and value your personal contribution aimed at supporting the peace process and promoting a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the entire region of the Middle East.

In the hope that our work will make a further constructive contribution to the deliberations of the General Assembly, I have the honour to enclose herewith the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for submission to the General Assembly in accordance with paragraph 5 of its resolution 54/39 of 1 December 1999. The report covers the period from 12 November 1999 to 10 October 2000.

Accept, Sir, the assurances of my highest consideration.

(*Signed*) Ibra Deguène **Ka**
Chairman of the Committee on the
Exercise of the Inalienable Rights
of the Palestinian People

Chapter I
Introduction

1. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was established by the General Assembly by resolution 3376 (XXX) of 10 November 1975, with the task of recommending a programme designed to enable the Palestinian people to exercise its inalienable rights as recognized by the Assembly in resolution 3236 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974.

2. The recommendations made by the Committee in its first report to the General Assembly[1] were endorsed by the Assembly as a basis for the solution of the question of Palestine. In its subsequent reports,[2] the Committee has continued to stress that a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, must be based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and the following essential principles: the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, and from the other occupied Arab territories; respect for the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized boundaries; and the recognition and exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination. The Committee's recommendations could not be implemented, and the Assembly each year renewed the Committee's mandate and requested it to intensify efforts in pursuit of its objectives.

3. The Committee welcomed the historic breakthrough in the peace process in 1993 and the subsequent important steps towards the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). At the same time, the Committee continued to work towards the full realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination and to its own independent State. The Committee also continued to mobilize the needed international assistance and solidarity during the transitional period.

4. Following the signing in September 1999 of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, the Committee was encouraged by steps aimed at its implementation, namely the partial release of Palestinian prisoners, the opening of the southern safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the further redeployment of Israeli troops from areas of the West Bank, the resumption of the interim and permanent status talks, and the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian agreements on the implementation of economic issues and on the construction work on the Gaza seaport. In March-April 2000, the Committee followed closely the discussions on permanent status issues held by the parties at Bolling Air Force Base near Washington, D.C. Much hope was attached by the Committee to the Middle East Peace Summit and negotiations that were held under the auspices of the President of the United States of America in July 2000 at Camp David, Maryland. Although the Peace Summit was inconclusive, the parties firmly committed themselves to continuing negotiations with a view to concluding an agreement on permanent status issues as soon as possible. The Committee observed with much concern, however, the failure to create the necessary momentum for the conclusion of a final agreement on 15 September 2000, as stipulated by the provisions of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum. In this regard, the Committee noted the determined effort of the United States President to re-engage the two sides on specific elements of the final settlement, in particular on the question of Jerusalem, in the course of the meetings held on the sidelines of the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000 in New York. The Committee was also encouraged by the important decisions of the Palestinian Central Council (PCC), held on 9 and 10 September 2000 in Gaza City, on the issue of Palestinian statehood and other permanent status issues. However, irrespective of the measure of progress achieved in the peace negotiations, the Committee reaffirmed the need for a speedy completion of the negotiations and the conclusion of a final settlement. In the meantime, the Committee stated its position of principle that the policies and practices of occupation were in violation of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949 (the Fourth Geneva Convention)[3] and Security Council resolutions, and could lead to an increased volatility on the ground, putting the entire peace process in jeopardy. In this connection, the Committee emphasized that, at the end of the five-year interim period, Israel is yet to carry out the third redeployment of its forces, release Palestinian prisoners and return Palestinian displaced persons.

5. In spite of the many setbacks faced by the peace process in the past year, the Committee remains confident that the parties, assisted by the co-sponsors,

will continue to make a determined effort aimed at reaching a final settlement and putting an end to decades of hostility and conflict. It is also the Committee's earnest hope that the entire international community will stand by and support the Israelis and the Palestinians in their quest for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. As the organ of the General Assembly entrusted to deal with the question of Palestine, the Committee has participated in the various international initiatives in this regard and will continue to do so until the question of Palestine is resolved in all its aspects and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are fully realized.

Chapter II
Mandate of the Committee

6. The mandate of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was again renewed by the General Assembly in resolution 54/39 of 1 December 1999, in which the Assembly, inter alia: (a) endorsed the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee[4] and requested it to continue to keep under review the situation relating to the question of Palestine and to report and make suggestions to the General Assembly or the Security Council, as appropriate; (b) authorized the Committee to continue to exert all efforts to promote the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session and thereafter; and (c) requested the Committee to continue to extend its cooperation and support to Palestinian and other non-governmental organizations in order to mobilize international solidarity and support for the achievement by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights and for a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine.

7. In its resolution 54/40 of 1 December 1999, on the Division for Palestinian Rights of the United Nations Secretariat, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to provide the Division with the necessary resources and to ensure that it continues to carry out its programme of work as detailed in the relevant earlier resolutions, including, in particular, the organization of meetings in various regions with the participation of all sectors of the international community, the further development and expansion of the documents collection of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine, the preparation and widest possible dissemination of publications and information materials on various aspects of the question of Palestine, the provision of assistance in completing the project on the modernization of the records of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP) and the provision of the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority.

8. In its resolution 54/41 of 1 December 1999, on the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat, the General Assembly requested the Department, in full cooperation and coordination with the Committee, to continue, with the necessary flexibility as may be required by developments affecting the question of Palestine, its special information programme for the biennium 2000-2001; and also requested the Department to promote the Bethlehem 2000 Project, within existing resources and until the Bethlehem 2000 commemoration comes to a close, including the preparation and dissemination of publications, audio-visual material and the establishment of a "Bethlehem 2000" site on the United Nations Internet home page.

9. In carrying out its programme of work, the Committee also took into account General Assembly resolution 54/42 of 1 December 1999 on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, in which the Assembly, inter alia, reaffirmed the necessity of achieving a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine in all its aspects, expressed its full support for the ongoing peace process, stressed the necessity for commitment to the principle of land for peace and the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which form the basis of the Middle East peace process; and also stressed the need for the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination; the need for the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967; and the need for resolving the problem of the Palestine refugees.

Chapter III
Organization of work

A. Membership and officers

10. The Committee is composed of the following Member States: Afghanistan, Belarus, Cuba, Cyprus, Guinea, Guyana, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Namibia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Romania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine and Yugoslavia.[5]

11. At its 250th meeting, on 3 February 2000, the Committee re-elected Ibra Deguène Ka (Senegal) as Chairman and re-elected Ravan A. G. Farhâdi (Afghanistan) and Bruno Eduardo Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) as Vice-Chairmen and Walter Balzan (Malta) as Rapporteur.

12. At the same meeting, the Committee adopted its programme of work for the year 2000.[6]

B. Participation in the work of the Committee

13. As in previous years, the Committee reconfirmed that all States Members of and permanent observers to the United Nations wishing to participate in the work of the Committee as observers were welcome to do so. In accordance with established practice, the Permanent Observer of Palestine participated in the work of the Committee as an observer, attended all its meetings and made observations and proposals for consideration by the Committee and its Bureau.

14. In 2000, the Committee again welcomed as observers all the States and organizations that had participated in its work in the preceding year.[7]

Chapter IV
Review of the situation relating to the question of Palestine

15. In pursuance of its mandate, the Committee continued to keep under review the situation relating to the question of Palestine and, in particular, to monitor the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. The Committee also continued to follow closely the various developments in the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. On numerous occasions in recent years, the Committee has voiced its concern over Israeli activities on the ground carried out in spite of the peace negotiations. In this regard, the Committee recalls its own and other parties' appeals to the Government of Israel to respect the spirit and the letter of the peace process and refrain from actions that may prejudge the outcome of the peace negotiations and erode trust and confidence between the parties.

16. Since November 1999, the Committee has observed with hope a series of actions taken on the ground in implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum. Those included the further redeployment of Israeli troops from parts of the West Bank, the agreement on the release of Palestinian prisoners, the opening of a southern safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the resumption of the negotiations on permanent status issues. The Committee welcomed the signing, on 7 June 2000, of the Israeli-Palestinian agreement on the implementation of economic issues, as well as the agreement concerning the Gaza seaport, signed on 20 September 2000. The Committee also took note of the official statement made by the PCC at the conclusion of its session in Gaza, on 9 and 10 September 2000. The Committee welcomed and supported the Council's decisions with regard to the postponement of the establishment of a State, as well as on steps to be taken in preparation for statehood, including the completion of work on the constitutional declaration and laws for presidential and parliamentary elections, and the submission of an application by Palestine for membership in the United Nations. In this regard, the Committee reiterated the inalienable, natural and historic right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty.

17. The Committee remained hopeful that efforts of the co-sponsors of the peace process would allow the parties to resolve their outstanding differences and move forward towards the framework and final settlement agreements in accordance with the agreed timetable. In this context, the Committee observed closely the negotiations on permanent status issues conducted in March-April 2000 at Bolling Air Force Base near Washington, D.C. and the intense discussions at the Middle East Peace Summit, held from 11 to 24 July 2000 under the auspices of President Clinton, at Camp David, Maryland. The Committee

was of the view that with the meetings at Camp David the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations had reached a high water mark. It was especially troubled, therefore, by the failure of the parties to bridge the gaps in their positions and reach a comprehensive agreement. It welcomed, however, the final Trilateral Statement made at the conclusion of the Peace Summit, in which both parties committed themselves to continue their efforts to conclude an agreement on all permanent status issues as soon as possible. The Committee expressed the hope that the meetings held by the two sides with the United States President on the sidelines of the Millennium Summit and afterwards would result in a breakthrough enabling the parties to move forward towards a final agreement. The Committee viewed the September 2000 decisions of the PCC as a critical stepping stone on the way to a serious consideration of all outstanding permanent status issues.

18. The Committee was greatly disturbed by the violent confrontations between the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and police and Palestinian civilians at the Al-Haram al-Sharif compound in the Old City of Jerusalem that erupted on 28 September 2000, following a visit to the holy site by the Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon, accompanied by a group of Likud Knesset members and hundreds of Israeli security personnel and police. Confrontations also took place all across the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, with over 90 people killed and more than 3,000 injured. Excessive force was used by IDF against the Palestinian protesters, including rubber-coated metal bullets, live ammunition, tanks and armoured personnel carriers, combat helicopters, anti-tank rockets and grenades. The Committee was shocked by the tragic loss of life as a result of these confrontations, in particular by the deaths of innocent Palestinian children. The Committee reiterated that these events were a direct result of the policies and practices of the Israeli occupation and the failure of Israel to respect its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention and the provisions of relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. The Committee firmly believed that Israel's continued refusal to live up to those principles, as well as the continued lack of progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, would allow despair and frustration to set in, put the peace process in considerable jeopardy and lead to an increased volatility on the ground. In an effort to stop the violence, Chairman Yasser Arafat and Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Barak met in Paris, on 4 October 2000, with the United States Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, French President Jacques Chirac and the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan. The Committee viewed these meetings and the understandings reached on 5 October 2000 at Sharm el-Sheikh as useful steps towards halting the violence on the ground, lessening tension between the two sides and resuming the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. The Committee also welcomed the determined effort to revive the peace process, undertaken by the United States Secretary of State, as well as the Presidents of France and Egypt and the United Nations Secretary-General. The Committee followed with great attention the deliberations in the Security Council with respect to the outbreak of violence and welcomed the adoption, on 7 October 2000, of resolution 1322 (2000) (see paras. 29-31).

19. Throughout the year, the Committee followed closely the situation on the ground, in particular the construction and expansion of the illegal Israeli settlements and road network in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem. The Committee firmly believed that Israel's settlement policy and actions remained a key factor causing great damage to the peace process. The Committee was greatly alarmed by the fact that, in spite of the ongoing negotiations, the settlement drive in the course of the year under review has been as vigorous as it had been in previous years. In fact, according to reports available to the Committee, between 15 October and 13 December 1999, the Israeli Government approved building plans for the construction of 2,575 new housing units in six West Bank settlements, approved the "deposit" of plans for an additional 2,139 units and for the placement of 85 mobile homes in settlements identified in October 1999. In January 2000, construction began on 39 units in the settlement of "Betar" near Bethlehem. This settlement, with a population of some 15,000, is fast approaching the size of a city. On 3 January 2000, the Israel Lands Administration issued a tender for the construction of 122 units in the settlement of "Pisgat Ze'ev" north of East Jerusalem. At the end of February 2000, there were more than 7,120 units in various stages of construction. It was also reported in February that Israel's Ministry of Transportation would spend US$ 100 million on roads in and around Jerusalem, with a focus on new corridors in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In March 2000, Israel's Higher Planning Council dealing with the West Bank gave

final approval for the construction of a high-tech industrial park in the "Etzion" block of settlements. The same month, 658 dunums of land belonging to the Palestinian villages of Issawiya, At-Tur, Al-Azariya, Abu Dis and Ras al-Amud were confiscated for the construction of the eastern ring road, intended to cut off East Jerusalem and its Palestinian residents from the rest of the city, and to connect Jewish settlers to Jerusalem. On 10 April 2000, the Knesset's Budget and Security Committee approved $400 million for settlement security and construction of 12 bypass roads in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In April, initial groundwork for a new settlement began at Olive Hill in the settlement of "Efrat", south of Bethlehem. A total of 1,816 plots of land in the Israeli settlements went up for sale in the first seven months of 2000. In the period from 8 July 1999 to 24 August 2000, a total of 3,419 tenders were issued for settlement construction. According to figures from Israel's Ministry of Construction and Housing, construction in settlements increased by 96 per cent in the first half of 2000. Work began on 1,067 residential units in the first six months of the year, compared to 545 during the same period in 1999. Of the 1,067 units, 860 were located in settlements in the Jerusalem district and 207 in other areas. The Committee reaffirmed in no uncertain terms that the policy of confiscation of Palestinian land, demolition of houses and other Palestinian property and construction of settlements constituted a serious violation of international law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention. The Committee was particularly appalled by the intensified construction at the Jabal Abu Ghneim and Ras al-Amud neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem. These actions are also in violation of the provisions of the Oslo and Wye River agreements and, by changing the status quo, predetermine the outcome of the permanent status negotiations.

20. On 27 July, Israel's Ministry of the Interior announced that the number of settlers in the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip had risen in the past year by 13,600 or 7.5 per cent and stood at some 200,000. The Committee reiterated its concern over the provocative and often violent actions of extremist settlers occupying Palestinian land, erecting makeshift houses and other structures and engaging in violent confrontations with Palestinians. During the year, settlers were collecting considerable donations in Israel and abroad to purchase special military and rescue equipment. According to the Council of Jewish Communities in Judea, Samaria and Gaza, the equipment is purchased in full coordination with the Israel Defence Forces, including the Regional Defence Officer in the IDF Central Command. In this regard, the Committee was alarmed by reports of increased settler activity, especially since the Camp David Peace Summit. This included a noticeable increase in the number of settlers with IDF-issued weapons and settlement fortification works in the vicinity of Hebron and Nablus, in particular.

21. The Committee stressed the inadmissibility and illegality of the Israeli policy of revoking the residency rights of Palestinian Jerusalemites. Although the Israeli Minister of the Interior declared the cessation of the revocation-of-residency policy in October 1999, no clear procedures have been introduced regarding the new policy, and the rules applied by the Ministry officials in East Jerusalem remained unclear.

22. The situation with regard to the Palestinian prisoners was of special concern to the Committee. Although a number of prisoners were released during the year, some 1,650 of them remained imprisoned in Israel. The Committee was especially alarmed by reports of administrative detention of Palestinians without charge or trial; overcrowded confinement conditions; solitary confinement as a means of severe punishment; inadequate medical care, resulting in some instances in the death of prisoners; deprivation of basic facilities, such as a place to practice religion and a place to study; restricted access to legal counsel; lack of privacy during legal consultations; and restrictions placed on family visits, which are arbitrarily granted by the prison administration, despite the intensive efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross to facilitate and arrange such visits. The Committee, greatly concerned about the aforementioned conditions of detention, again called upon the Government of Israel to abide by the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

23. In the year under review, the Palestinian economy has continued to experience serious difficulties, although a measure of progress has been achieved in some areas. The economy remained beset by a number of restrictions on Palestinian economic transactions, limited passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and persistent unemployment. There was also a pressing need to improve the physical environment and underdeveloped infrastructure, including water, energy, transportation and the sewage system. The Committee was of the view that it was incumbent on the

international community to assist the Palestinian people in rehabilitating infrastructure, improving natural resources management, institutional capacity-building, human resources and social development, and in developing productive sectors of the economy. In this connection, the Committee greatly appreciated the diversified and substantial assistance provided to the Palestinian people during the year. It again stressed the need and urgency of assisting the Palestinian people in meeting their social and economic development needs so as to create a solid foundation for future peace and stability in the region. The contribution of donor countries remained essential. Encouraged by the readiness of the international donor community to continue to assist the Palestinian people, the Committee called upon the donors to increase their commitments and the disbursement of funds. The United Nations system, especially the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the United Nations Development Programme, continued to focus its activities on developing Palestinian infrastructure, enhancing institutional capacity and improving the living conditions of the Palestinian people. The Committee noted with satisfaction the useful role played by the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority. Along with his responsibilities for providing political support to the parties in the region, he continued to serve as an important focal point for all United Nations entities operating on the ground and to maintain contact with the donor community, NGOs and others.

24. The water supply situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory remained serious, with water shortages stifling the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian households. Reports available to the Committee indicated that, while the average Israeli consumed 348 litres of water a day, average water consumption among Palestinians was 70 litres a day. Therefore, Israeli water consumption for household, municipal and industrial use was, on average, five times higher than that of the Palestinians. The water shortage in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was characterized by the absence of a water distribution network; discriminatory and insufficient supply of water; and poor quality of water. More than 150 villages, home to some 215,000 Palestinians, were not connected to a water network, compelling the villagers to purchase water from private dealers at high prices. Some municipalities in the West Bank must rotate the water supply by areas in order to distribute the little water available, particularly during the summer. The town of Yatta, for example, is divided into 14 sectors, each sector receiving water once every 45 days for two to three days. The poor water quality, particularly in the Gaza Strip, had a severe impact on the quality of daily life of the Palestinian population and exposed them to serious health risks.

25. UNRWA remained a vital source of humanitarian and socio-economic assistance to some 3.7 million Palestine refugees. Regrettably, in spite of the recognition given by members of the international community to the laudable work done by UNRWA, there was a noticeable discrepancy between that recognition and the willingness to provide resources to the Agency. This has caused major operational difficulty for UNRWA in its effort to maintain an adequate quality of service to Palestine refugees.

Chapter V
Action taken by the Committee

A. Action taken in accordance with General Assembly resolution 54/39

26. In pursuance of its mandate and in response to the difficulties experienced by the peace process and in the search for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, the Committee continued to mobilize the international community in support of the Palestinian people, in cooperation with United Nations bodies, Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and others, as indicated below.

1. Communications to the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General

27. In a letter dated 24 March 2000 addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2000/253), the Chairman of the Committee reiterated the Committee's objection to the deletion from the list of items of which the Council was seized those items that related to the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, the Palestine question and the Middle East problem, and which were of special concern not only to

the Committee but also to the majority of Member States. He stated the Committee's belief that pending a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East, the core of which is the question of Palestine, in accordance with international legitimacy, these items should remain on the list of matters of which the Council is seized, as they continue to engage its responsibility with regard to the maintenance of international peace and security. He also stressed that any decision to delete these items, especially at this critical point in the peace process, would go well beyond procedural reform and would have far-reaching negative political implications.

28. In a letter dated 2 October 2000 addressed to the Secretary-General (A/55/440-S/2000/936), the Chairman of the Committee drew the attention of the Secretary-General, as a matter of urgency, to the violent confrontations between IDF and Israeli police and Palestinian worshippers at Al-Aqsa Mosque and throughout the Haram al-Sharif compound that had erupted on 28 September 2000. He referred to reports indicating that most of the dead and injured in the confrontations had sustained wounds caused by rubber-coated metal bullets and live ammunition. The Chairman stressed that excessive force had been used by IDF against the Palestinian protesters, including tanks, helicopter gunships, anti-tank missiles and grenades. On behalf of the Committee, he expressed the gravest and growing concern at the continued confrontations in the Old City of Jerusalem and throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Chairman said the Committee was dismayed by the loss of life as a result of the confrontations and was particularly saddened by the tragic deaths of innocent Palestinian children. The Committee was of the view that the events were a direct result of the policies and practices of the Israeli occupation. The Chairman said Israel had continued to violate its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention and the provisions of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. He also alluded to the fact that the Committee had warned on a number of occasions that Israel's failure to live up to those principles, as well as the continued lack of progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, would allow despair and frustration to set in, putting the peace process in considerable jeopardy and leading to an increased volatility on the ground. The Chairman addressed an urgent appeal to the Secretary-General and all the parties concerned to take the necessary steps in order to induce Israel to abide by its obligations and responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention, to guarantee its respect for the Holy Places, and to ensure international protection of the Palestinian people. He said the Committee reiterated its long-standing position that the United Nations should continue to exercise its permanent responsibility towards all the aspects of the question of Palestine, including the issue of Jerusalem, until it is resolved in a satisfactory manner, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions and in accordance with international legitimacy, and until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are fully realized.

2. Action in the Security Council

29. Following the events of 28 September 2000 (see para. 18), massive protests and violent confrontations took place in other parts of the Old City of Jerusalem and throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. At the request of the Permanent Representative of Iraq to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Arab Group of States for the month of October 2000, the Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations, on behalf of the members of the Non-Aligned Movement Caucus, and also in his capacity as Chairman of the Islamic Group of States, the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chair of the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, the Security Council met on 3, 4, 5 and 7 October 2000 to consider agenda item "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" (S/2000/928, S/2000/929, S/2000/930, S/2000/934 and S/2000/935).

30. The Chairman of the Committee participated in the debate in the Security Council on 4 October 2000 and made a statement on behalf of the Committee. In his statement, the Chairman reviewed the situation on the ground and joined the international community in calling on both parties to refrain from further escalation of violence and do their utmost to defuse the tension. He also joined the large part of the international community, which was calling on the Israeli Government, political parties and security forces to desist from taking any further measures that would undermine the peace process; to ensure respect for the Holy Places; to guarantee the protection of the Palestinians and their property in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem; to put an

end to all illegal settlement activities; and to proceed rapidly towards the full implementation of the agreements already reached with a view to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The Chairman stated that the Committee believed that only rapid and consistent progress in the peace process leading to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East would prevent the situation from deteriorating even further, with unforeseen consequences for peace and stability in the entire region. The Chairman reiterated the position of the Committee that the United Nations should continue to exercise its permanent responsibility towards all the aspects of the question of Palestine, including the issue of Jerusalem, until it is resolved in a satisfactory manner, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions and in accordance with international legitimacy, and until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are fully realized.

31. On 7 October 2000, at its 4205th meeting, the Security Council adopted resolution 1322 (2000), which had been submitted by Bangladesh, Jamaica, Malaysia, Mali, Namibia, Tunisia and Ukraine. In the resolution, the Council deplored the provocation carried out at Al-Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem on 28 September 2000 and the subsequent violence there and at other Holy Places, as well as in other areas throughout the territories occupied by Israel since 1967, resulting in over 80 Palestinian deaths and many other casualties; condemned acts of violence, especially the excessive use of force against Palestinians, resulting in injury and loss of human life; called upon Israel, the occupying Power, to abide scrupulously by its legal obligations and its responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention; called for the immediate cessation of violence, and for all necessary steps to be taken to ensure that violence ceased, that new provocative actions were avoided, and that the situation returned to normality in a way which promoted the prospects for the Middle East peace process; stressed the importance of establishing a mechanism for a speedy and objective inquiry into the tragic events of the past few days with the aim of preventing their repetition, and welcomed any efforts in that regard; called for the immediate resumption of negotiations within the Middle East peace process on its agreed basis with the aim of achieving an early final settlement between the Israeli and Palestinian sides; invited the Secretary-General to continue to follow the situation and to keep the Council informed; and decided to follow closely the situation and to remain seized of the matter.

3. Participation by the Chairman of the Committee at international conferences and meetings

32. In the course of the year, the Chairman of the Committee participated in meetings of intergovernmental and other bodies and other meetings relevant to the question of Palestine and contributed to their deliberations in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, as follows:

(a) International Conference on Jerusalem, London, 13-15 December 1999, organized by the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House), at which the Chairman delivered a statement on the question of Jerusalem;

(b) Seventy-first ordinary session of the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity, Addis Ababa, 6-10 March 2000;

(c) Thirteenth Ministerial Conference of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, 8 and 9 April 2000 (A/54/917-S/2000/580);

(d) The South Summit of the Group of 77, Havana, 10-14 April 2000 (A/55/74);

(e) Twenty-seventh session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, Kuala Lumpur, 27-30 June 2000 (A/54/949-S/2000/746);

(f) Seventy-second ordinary session of the Council of Ministers and thirty-sixth ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity, Lomé, 6-12 July 2000 (A/55/286).

33. As in previous years, the Committee continued to follow the activities relevant to the question of Palestine of other intergovernmental organizations, as well as decisions and resolutions of United Nations bodies and agencies, including the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Human Rights, and the positive efforts made by many Governments. The Committee took note of the declarations of concern on the part of the international community over the degree of progress achieved in the peace process in the course of the year. It was encouraged by

the broad international support for the peace efforts and the readiness of the international community to help the parties bring the peace process to fruition.

B. Action taken by the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 54/39 and 54/40

34. In its programme of meetings organized in the various regions, the Committee continued to give priority to promoting the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, supporting the peace process and stressing the need for timely and scrupulous implementation by the parties of the bilateral agreements. The Committee also urged the international community to continue to provide political support, as well as broad economic assistance, to the Palestinian people.

35. On the basis of the provision contained in General Assembly resolution 54/39, the Committee adjusted this programme, as necessary, in order to meet the evolving situation in the most effective and constructive manner, while keeping in mind the continuing financial constraints facing the Organization. The Committee expressed its great appreciation to the Governments of Viet Nam, Greece and Egypt for having provided venues and facilities for the events sponsored by the Committee.

36. Following the practice of previous years, the Committee, through its Bureau, continued its cooperation on the question of Palestine with States members of the European Union (EU). In July 2000, the Bureau held an important and useful meeting of consultations with representatives of EU (under the presidency of France) as part of the continued effort to build a constructive relationship with EU members on issues of common concern. In accordance with established practice, the Chairman of the Committee briefed the members of the EU delegation on the ongoing activities of the Committee, including the project on the modernization of records of the UNCCP. The Chairman also informed the EU delegation on the activities planned by the Committee for the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly. He also expressed the hope that the two sides would continue consultations.

37. Throughout the year, the staff of the Division for Palestinian Rights met at United Nations Headquarters with members of the general public and student groups and briefed them on the various aspects of the question of Palestine and the involvement of the United Nations in this issue.

1. United Nations Asian Meeting on the Question of Palestine

38. The United Nations Asian Meeting on the Question of Palestine was held in Hanoi from 1 to 3 March 2000. The participants included representatives of Governments, Palestine, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, United Nations bodies and agencies, special guests from the host country and representatives of the media, the academic community and students.

39. The participants discussed the following topics: the peace process and Palestinian statehood; the United Nations and the question of Palestine; international support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people; and the role of parliaments in achieving the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

40. At the conclusion of the Conference, the participants adopted the Hanoi Declaration, in which they declared their broad and determined commitment to support the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State. They also stated, inter alia, that the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, as well as other Arab territories, must be brought to an end without delay and that mutual recognition and peaceful coexistence must be given the opportunity to flourish; Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which embodied the principle of land for peace and formed the legal basis for the Middle East peace process, must be adhered to; in view of the continued settlement activities, the United Nations and the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention should play an effective role in reconvening the Conference of the High Contracting Parties; the deadline of September 2000 to achieve a permanent status agreement in accordance with the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum and the international consensus, which had been developed at the end of the five-year transition in May 1999, should be observed; and that the United Nations should grant full membership to Palestine to enable it to participate fully in the United Nations Millennium Summit.

41. The Committee delegation was received by H.E. Mr. Phan Van Khai, Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, who welcomed the efforts of the Committee aimed at bringing about a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. The delegation was also received by H.E. Mr. Nguyen Dy Nien, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam.

42. The report of the Meeting was issued as a publication of the Division for Palestinian Rights.

2. International Conference on Palestine Refugees

43. The International Conference on Palestine Refugees was held at the headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in Paris, on 26 and 27 April 2000. The Conference was organized by the Committee in cooperation with the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States. Among the participants were eminent personalities, including high-level officials, experts on the Palestine refugee issue, representatives of States Members of the United Nations, representatives of intergovernmental organizations and United Nations agencies, parliamentarians, members of the academic community, representatives of non-governmental and other civil society organizations, as well as the media.

44. The participants discussed the following issues: Palestine refugees — the longest-running humanitarian problem in today's world; the United Nations and Palestine refugees; and Palestine refugees and the current Middle East peace process.

45. In their concluding remarks, the organizers of the Conference stressed that the social and economic conditions of some 3.7 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA remained difficult and required urgent intervention on the part of the international community. They noted that the plight of Palestine refugees was among the permanent status issues negotiated by the parties. It was emphasized, in this context, that a just solution to the question of Palestine and a lasting peace in the Middle East could not be achieved without a just and fair solution to the question of Palestine refugees. They stated that the multilateral track of negotiations remained an essential part of the peace process and that the Refugee Working Group, chaired by Canada since 1992, continued to play a useful supporting role. The organizers reaffirmed that the right of return of Palestine refugees to their homes, as stipulated by the General Assembly in its resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948, remained a *conditio sine qua non* for the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty. They also stated that the provisions of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and subsequent relevant United Nations resolutions remained valid and must be taken into full consideration in any final settlement of the question of Palestine. The organizers reaffirmed the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to return to their land and property, abandoned as a result of the 1948 and 1967 hostilities. They considered the issue of refugee compensation to be an integral element of, but not a substitute for, their right of return. They were of the view that the international community should continue to support the vital activities of UNRWA until the question of Palestine refugees is resolved in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions and international legitimacy. The organizers noted with appreciation the role played by the co-sponsors of the peace process, the European Union and the international donor community in creating conditions on the ground conducive to the success of the peace process.

46. The report of the Conference was issued as a publication of the Division for Palestinian Rights.

3. United Nations NGO Meeting on Palestine Refugees

47. The United Nations NGO Meeting on Palestine Refugees was held at UNESCO headquarters, Paris, on 28 April 2000, immediately following the International Conference on Palestine Refugees. The participants included representatives of NGOs from all regions, Governments, United Nations bodies and agencies, intergovernmental organizations, a delegation of Palestine and a number of panellists.

48. The participants discussed the following issues: the role of NGOs in promoting a just settlement of the Palestine refugee problem; the experience of NGOs in delivering basic social services to refugee communities; promoting stronger support to UNRWA; promoting awareness of Palestine refugee rights internationally; and the role of NGOs in empowering the refugee communities.

49. In the NGO statement, the participating organizations declared that the provisions of General

Assembly resolution 194 (III) and subsequent relevant United Nations resolutions remained valid and must be taken into full consideration in any final settlement of the question of Palestine and called upon the United Nations to continue to protect the natural and inalienable right of Palestinians to return to their homes and act as its guarantor, pending a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. They expressed particular alarm at the plight of Palestine refugees living in Lebanon and firmly rejected any attempt to use their fate for issues not related to the Palestine refugee problem. The NGOs pledged to utilize their expertise and experience in communication, education, advocacy and assistance in locally and internationally coordinated efforts on behalf of Palestine refugees in areas such as: increased commitment to UNRWA services; the need to ensure both quantity and quality of service coverage; the development and empowerment of refugee community structures, especially relating to women; increased capacity of refugee communities to address their own socio-economic needs; full refugee participation in development aid programmes; ensuring that Palestinian refugees are not excluded from the internationally accepted frameworks that have guided solutions to other refugee populations; and promoting refugee representation in political processes regarding their future.

50. The report of the NGO Meeting was issued as a publication of the Division for Palestinian Rights.

4. United Nations International Meeting in Support of a Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Establishment of Peace in the Middle East

51. The United Nations International Meeting in Support of a Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Establishment of Peace in the Middle East was held in Athens on 23 and 24 May 2000. The Meeting was attended by international experts, eminent political personalities from Greece, representatives of Governments, intergovernmental organizations, entities of the United Nations system, the Palestinian Authority, civil society organizations and the media.

52. The following topics were discussed by the participants: final status negotiations and Palestinian statehood; international support for a just and peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and the establishment of a lasting peace in the Middle East; and civil society in support of the peace process.

53. In their Final Statement, the participants, among other things, expressed concern that yet another target date for the conclusion of a framework agreement had been missed. In the light of this, the parties were urged to do everything in their power to preserve and solidify the accomplishments of the peace process and to make an effort to achieve a final settlement agreement by September 2000. The participants also stressed the urgency of reaching an agreement on interim issues, namely the third Israeli redeployment from the West Bank, the release of Palestinian prisoners, the opening of the northern safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the operation of the Gaza seaport, and economic issues. The participants noted that, in the preceding months, the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations had been offset on a number of occasions by Israeli actions on the ground and Israeli Government statements, incompatible with the spirit and the letter of the peace process. The participants reiterated the permanent responsibility of the United Nations with respect to all aspects of the question of Palestine, until a satisfactory settlement based on relevant United Nations resolutions and international legitimacy was reached and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people were fully realized. The participants appreciated the contribution by EU members to the peace process. EU's political support and large volume of economic assistance were viewed as vital to the efforts aimed at rehabilitating and developing the Palestinian economy. The participants acknowledged the important role played by civil society in the process of transition to Palestinian statehood, as well as in building and developing Palestinian institutions.

54. The Committee delegation was received by H.E. Mr. George Papandreou, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece, who welcomed the efforts of the Committee aimed at bringing about a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement on the question of Palestine.

55. The report of the Meeting was issued as a publication of the Division for Palestinian Rights.

5. United Nations Seminar on Prospects for Palestinian Economic Development and the Middle East Peace Process

56. The United Nations Seminar on Prospects for Palestinian Economic Development and the Middle

East Peace Process was held in Cairo on 20 and 21 June 2000. The Meeting was attended by representatives of Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, United Nations system organizations and agencies, and experts.

57. The following topics were discussed by the participants: Palestinian institution-building and economic performance during the interim period — achievements, shortcomings and future tasks; Palestinian development objectives and strategies; international assistance to the Bethlehem 2000 Project of the Palestinian Authority; Israeli-Palestinian economic relations during the interim period; and the impact of non-economic issues on sustained Palestinian economic and social development (Israeli settlements, Jerusalem, Palestine refugees, water and natural resources).

58. In his concluding remarks of the Seminar, the Chairman of the Committee said that the Committee had always attached great importance to social and economic development and the improvement of living conditions of the Palestinian people. It was for this reason that the Committee had devoted a special place in its annual programme of work to social and economic issues of the transitional stage. In a continued effort to mobilize international assistance to the emerging Palestinian nation, the Committee had decided to convene the United Nations Seminar on Prospects for Palestinian Economic Development and the Middle East Peace Process. The participants reviewed the current status of Palestinian institution-building and economic performance during the interim period, and the steps taken towards establishing a better environment for sustainable economic development, in coordination with donors, intergovernmental organizations and other actors. The experience gained in the past several years has been thoroughly discussed and formed the basis for formulating objectives and strategies of Palestinian development. The participants were of the view that partnership between Israelis and Palestinians in the peace process had to be accompanied by partnership in economic development, and that the sustainability of Palestinian economic and social development was in great measure influenced by non-economic issues. The outcome of the negotiations on interim and permanent status issues would most certainly affect the present Palestinian economic activity and the future of the Palestinian economy in general.

59. The report of the Seminar was issued as a document of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council for consideration under the relevant agenda items (A/55/144-E/2000/87). It was also issued as a publication of the Division for Palestinian Rights.

6. Cooperation with non-governmental organizations

60. In the course of the year, the Committee has continued to encourage NGOs in all regions to mobilize international solidarity with the Palestinian people and support for the achievement of its inalienable rights. The Committee emphasized the important role of civil society in educating the various constituencies about the fundamental issues of the question of Palestine and in mobilizing public support for the Palestinian cause and the peace process. The Committee has continued its practice of inviting civil society organizations to all international conferences and meetings organized under its auspices. Participating NGOs used these events to inform the other participants about their initiatives and campaigns and to bring forward their views and ideas on the issues at stake. In addition to the United Nations NGO Meeting on Palestine Refugees, organized on 28 April 2000 at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, the Committee provided NGOs participating in meetings in Hanoi and Athens with the time and facilities to conduct their own meetings in order to advance further cooperation and networking among themselves. A large number of NGOs participated actively in all these meetings and manifested particular support for the right of return of Palestine refugees.

61. Consultations between the Bureau of the Committee and NGO representatives were held on 26 November 1999 in New York in order to continue the dialogue with NGO activists on the future shape of cooperation with civil society. The consultations were followed up with an additional meeting in the course of the United Nations Seminar on Prospects for Palestinian Economic Development and the Middle East Peace Process, held in Cairo in June 2000. The participants reviewed the effect of the Committee's restructured work programme on their cooperation with the Committee and made suggestions to further increase its effectiveness. The Bureau urged the NGOs to focus their initiatives on the most crucial issues at stake and to mobilize solidarity movements in support

of Palestine refugees and a just solution of the question of Jerusalem.

62. The Division for Palestinian Rights maintained the Internet web site entitled "NGO Network on the Question of Palestine", launched in September 1999, and, in consultation with NGOs, developed it into a permanent tool of mutual information and cooperation between the Committee and civil society. The web site can be found at <http://www.un.org/depts/dpa/ngo>. The Division also continued to issue its periodic newsletter entitled *NGO Action News* covering the activities of civil society on the various aspects of the question of Palestine.

7. Research, monitoring and publications

63. The Committee continued to attach great importance to the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights and requested it to continue its established programme of work, including studies, information notes and other publications; the further development of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL); the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority; and the annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

64. Accordingly, the Division continued to respond to requests for information and to prepare and disseminate to its worldwide network the following publications:

(a) Monthly bulletin covering action by the Committee, United Nations bodies and agencies, and intergovernmental organizations concerned with the question of Palestine;

(b) Monthly chronology of events relating to the question of Palestine, based on media reports and other sources;

(c) Reports of meetings organized under the auspices of the Committee;

(d) Special bulletin on the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People;

(e) Annual compilation of relevant resolutions, decisions and statements of the General Assembly and the Security Council relating to the question of Palestine.

8. United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine

65. The Division for Palestinian Rights, in cooperation with relevant technical services of the United Nations Secretariat, continued to develop UNISPAL, as mandated by the General Assembly since 1991. This included the required ongoing upgrading of the system's hardware and software components; the scanning, retyping or downloading, editing and inclusion into the system of several hundreds of new and old documents; the improvement of quality control mechanisms; and the further development and improvement of access to the "UNISPAL" and "Question of Palestine" sites on the Internet.

66. The staff of the Division completed the coordination and supervision of the electronic conversion by a contractor of the records of the UNCCP, in pursuance of the mandate given by the General Assembly in its resolution 51/129 of 13 December 1996.

9. Training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority

67. Two staff members from the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation of the Palestinian Authority participated in a training programme conducted by the Division, from September to December 1999, in conjunction with the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. They familiarized themselves with various aspects of the work of the Secretariat and other organs. The programme included, among other things, attendance at various briefings and meetings of relevant committees and bodies of the United Nations, meetings with representatives of delegations to the General Assembly and members of staff of permanent missions to the United Nations. The trainees also conducted research and prepared studies on specific topics of interest to them.

10. International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

68. The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People was observed on 29 November 1999 at United Nations Headquarters and at the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna. On the occasion of the observance at Headquarters, in addition to a solemn meeting of the Committee and other activities, an exhibit entitled "Follow the Star: Images from the

Palestinian City of Bethlehem at the New Millennium" was presented by the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, under the auspices of the Committee. The Committee noted with appreciation that the International Day of Solidarity had also been observed in many other cities throughout the world. Details on the observance are contained in the special bulletin issued by the Division.

69. In adopting its programme of work, the Committee decided that a similar event would be organized in connection with the observance of the Day in 2000.

C. Action taken in accordance with General Assembly resolution 54/22

70. In pursuance of General Assembly resolution 54/22 of 10 November 1999 and in response to the overwhelming support the resolution had received by the Assembly, the Committee continued to attach great importance to educating public opinion on the Bethlehem 2000 Project of the Palestinian Authority and promoting the Project.

71. In a letter dated 7 September 2000 addressed to the Secretary-General, the Chairman of the Committee said that the Committee had consistently reserved a special place for the Bethlehem 2000 Project in its various activities and in its meetings programme. The importance of heightening awareness of and promoting support for the Project had been highlighted at the United Nations Seminar on Prospects for Palestinian Economic Development and the Middle East Peace Process, held at Cairo on 20 and 21 June 2000. The Bureau of the Committee had also discussed this important issue with representatives of intergovernmental organizations, such as the European Union, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States, as well as with NGOs. The Chairman of the Committee recalled that over the year he had consistently promoted the Committee's objectives and activities, including its support for the Project, in the course of the discussions he had had at the various intergovernmental meetings attended by him in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee, especially those organized by the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Organization of African Unity and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. The Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat continued to disseminate information about the Project through UNISPAL, which could be accessed on the Internet through the United Nations home page or at <http://domino.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF>. Also, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 54/41, the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat had established an Internet web site entitled "Bethlehem 2000", which could be found at <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpi/bethlehem2000>. Substantial contributions had been made by Member States, intergovernmental and civil society organizations. The Chairman stated that a lot was yet to be accomplished within the remaining time frame of the Project, as well as in the months and years to come, in the City of Bethlehem and in other Palestinian municipalities throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian people would require considerable international assistance in order to deal successfully with the enormous rehabilitation and development tasks. Donor assistance, therefore, was vital for the improvement of the economic and social conditions of the Palestinian people and for creating a viable Palestinian economy. The Committee renewed its appeal to the international community to continue to support and render assistance to the Bethlehem 2000 Project of the Palestinian Authority and to the development of all other Palestinian municipalities (A/55/370).

Chapter VI
Action taken by the Department of Public Information in accordance with General Assembly resolution 54/41

72. In pursuance of General Assembly resolution 54/41 of 1 December 1999, the Department of Public Information continued its special information programme on the question of Palestine, which included, among other things, the organization of its annual training programme for Palestinian broadcasters and journalists and the production of an exhibit, in English and French, entitled "The United Nations and the Question of Palestine".

73. From 25 October to 17 December 1999, the Department organized a training programme at Headquarters for a group of seven Palestinian broadcasters and journalists to strengthen their professional capacity as information media personnel.

As was the case since the programme's beginning in 1995, the Department arranged a series of briefings and workshops at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs in New York and at CNN in Atlanta. Briefings were also organized for the participants at United Nations Headquarters and at international organizations and at institutions of the Government of the United States of America in Washington, D.C. As part of their training, participants covered meetings of the General Assembly and transmitted radio, television and print reports back to their news organizations in the Middle East.

74. On 16 December 1999, the Department launched an exhibit on "The United Nations and the Question of Palestine" containing illustrations, maps and text on the history and situation of the Palestinian people and tracing the search for a solution to the question of Palestine. The exhibit is currently a permanent part of the guided tour route at Headquarters. A French-language version of the exhibit was launched at UNESCO headquarters in Paris on 29 May 2000 and was scheduled to remain there through 15 December 2000.

75. In September 2000, the Department began production of a colour brochure in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish and German, entitled "The United Nations and the Question of Palestine". Based on the aforementioned exhibit, the brochure will be distributed worldwide through the network of United Nations information centres (UNICs) and services and will be placed on the United Nations home page.

76. In March-June 2000, the Department launched the English and Arabic versions of the "Bethlehem 2000" Internet web site, which is illustrated with photos supplied by the Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People of the United Nations Development Programme.

77. The Department provided press release coverage, in English and French, of all meetings held at United Nations Headquarters, including those of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. Coverage in English and French was also provided to the conferences and meetings held under the auspices of the Committee at locations away from Headquarters. Press releases were also issued concerning relevant statements by the Secretary-General.

78. The quarterly publication *UN Chronicle* continued its coverage of issues concerning the question of Palestine between November 1999 and August 2000. It regularly reported on peacekeeping operations in the Middle East. In addition, Issue No. 4, 1999, featured an article by Ibrahim Abu Lughod, entitled "In Palestine — Integration, Development, Participation". Issue No. 1, 2000, reported on the work of the General Assembly's Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), including the Committee's action on the various aspects of the question of Palestine.

79. At the request of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library cooperated with the Division on digitizing General Assembly press releases dating back to 1947 for the UNISPAL documents collection.

80. The Video Section produced a World Chronicle show with Mr. Peter Hansen, Commissioner-General of UNRWA. World Chronicle is a half-hour television interview current affairs programme produced by the Department and distributed to TV broadcasters in North America, Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. DPI also produced and distributed three "UN in Action" TV programmes, entitled "50 Years Later and UNRWA is Still Needed", "Bethlehem 2000 Project" and "UNRWA Assists Small Palestinian Entrepreneurs". The programmes were produced in the six official languages and shown weekly on CNN World Report and other networks worldwide.

81. The Radio News Unit covered extensively the various aspects of the question of Palestine and related issues in its news and current affairs programmes in the official and non-official languages for regional and worldwide dissemination. During the period under review, the Unit conducted special interviews in Arabic with Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, Secretary-General of "Miftah", and Mrs. Samia Bamia, representative of the Palestinian Women's Union. Some of the topics covered in various languages included: International Cooperation and Planning of Palestine meeting welcoming the outcome of the Conference on the Fourth Geneva Convention; briefing of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People on a Cairo meeting and other activities; debate on the agenda item "Question of Palestine" at the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly; the Palestinian economy as a result of developments in the peace operations; Palestinian

economy suffers due to many years of occupation; health situation of women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory; the debate in the Fourth Committee on the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories; the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People; and the General Assembly vote on resolutions concerning Palestine-related issues. In addition to short items in news and current affairs magazines, the Service produced 12 features and 13 magazines in Arabic, Bangla, Chinese, English, French, Indonesian, Turkish and Urdu.

82. As in previous years, a major focus of the work of the United Nations information centres was the promotion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Special events and activities to observe the Day were organized by UNICs Asunción, Bonn, Cairo, Dar-es-Salaam, Harare, Lisbon, Mexico City, Moscow, New Delhi, Rabat, Paris, Prague, Pretoria, Sydney, Tokyo and Tunis. The activities included briefings, press conferences, radio and television programmes, seminars and exhibitions.

83. Throughout the year, UNICs have been involved in a number of activities promoting better understanding of the question of Palestine and its various aspects. UNIC Paris assisted the UNESCO secretariat in mounting the aforementioned DPI exhibit entitled "The United Nations and the Question of Palestine" at UNESCO headquarters. UNIC Tokyo, in collaboration with Japanese NGOs active in providing assistance to the Palestinian people, set up an exhibit on the theme "The United Nations Works for Palestine Refugees". To highlight the Bethlehem 2000 Project, UNIC Harare, in cooperation with the Embassy of Palestine in Zimbabwe, organized an interdenominational Zimbabwean choir to represent the country at the Easter celebrations in Bethlehem. UNIC Rome, in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, co-sponsored a football match between teams of famous artists and representatives from Israel and Palestine at the Rome Olympic Stadium to draw attention to the issue of peace. H.E. Mr. Yasser Arafat, Shimon Peres and the Italian President were among the personalities attending the event, which was telecast live by RAI. UNIC Tunis produced a publication entitled "Bethlehem 2000" for distribution to the media. UNIC Tunis carried information on the Centre's home page concerning an event commemorating the Bethlehem 2000 Project. UNICs Bonn, Lisbon, Moscow, New Delhi, Sana'a and UNO Baku translated and widely disseminated an article written by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA Mr. Peter Hansen, entitled "Nurturing Palestine Refugees for Peace". Information outreach on the various aspects of the question of Palestine has been further strengthened by use of the Internet. UNIC Bonn posted the German translation of the Secretary-General's message for the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on the Centre's home page. UNIC Paris provided logistical support and information dissemination for the International Conference on Palestinian Refugees, held at UNESCO headquarters in April 2000. UNIC Athens assisted the Division for Palestinian Rights in organizing the United Nations International Meeting in Support of a Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Establishment of Peace in the Middle East in May 2000. UNIC Cairo undertook media coverage for the United Nations Seminar on Prospects for Palestinian Economic Development and the Middle East Peace Process, held in July 2000.

Chapter VII
Conclusions and recommendations of the Committee

84. As humankind is preparing to enter the new millennium, the future of peace in the region stands at a critical crossroads. In the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, the two sides have travelled a long way. The negotiating process, which began at Madrid in 1991, has been difficult and challenging. Today, the parties are facing issues of paramount importance not only for the Israelis and the Palestinians, but also for peace and security in the entire region of the Middle East. The outcome of this process will shape the future of their relations for years to come. The Committee will continue to support the peacemaking efforts by the parties, assisted by the co-sponsors, until peace prevails and the question of Palestine is solved on the basis of justice and international legitimacy.

85. The Committee noted with much regret that, following the signing in 1999 of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, a considerable amount of time has been lost. In the period under review, the situation in the

Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations remained a cause for serious concern, marked by frequent breakdowns and only a few breakthroughs. For most of the year, progress in the interim and permanent status talks has been slow. The Committee, however, welcomed a number of steps made in implementation of the agreements, including the partial release of Palestinian prisoners, the opening of a safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the further redeployment of Israeli troops from areas of the West Bank, and the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian agreements on economic issues and on the Gaza seaport. In September 2000, the important meetings held on the sidelines of the Millennium Summit created expectations that a breakthrough was at hand.

86. The Committee wishes to emphasize once again that more than 50 years after the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947, the Palestinian people is yet to see the establishment of its own independent and sovereign State. In this context, the Committee reiterates its full support for the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State, and recalls the broad international support for Palestinian statehood.

87. At a time when both sides are dealing with the critical permanent status negotiations, the situation on the ground remains untenable. Illegal "facts on the ground" continue to be created in gross violation of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. This also jeopardizes the possibility of making tangible progress in the peace negotiations. The Committee considers it unacceptable that, on the threshold of the third millennium, the Palestinian people, in their daily lives, are still carrying the heavy weight of occupation. One of the core issues in the permanent status negotiations is the question of Jerusalem. The Committee believes that the issue should be resolved based on Security Council resolution 242 (1967), other relevant United Nations resolutions, the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, and with due regard to the universal spiritual meaning of the Holy City of Jerusalem for all humankind. Among other permanent status issues, the question of Palestine refugees is a most difficult and painful one. Generations of Palestinians have grown up as refugees, living in dismal conditions of refugee camps or under occupation, many away from their homeland, denied their natural right to self-determination, with bleak economic prospects, their freedom of movement restricted, families torn apart, their hopes for the future dependent on the outside world. If this problem is not resolved with due care, patience and in accordance with norms of international law, more Palestinian lives will be ruined, frustration and mistrust will set in again and the potential for peace and stability in the region will be seriously jeopardized. The Committee reiterates its view that the solution to the problem should be based on General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948 and other relevant resolutions. Nothing has altered the situation on the ground since 1967 more than the illegal settlements spread around the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. They have not only changed the geography of the area, but also had the most devastating immediate and long-term effect on the livelihood of individual Palestinian households and the Palestinian economy in general. The Committee was appalled that the settlement activity continued alongside the peace negotiations — a policy which stands in marked contrast to the mutually agreed ground rules of the peace process.

88. The Committee strongly believes that the United Nations should continue to exercise its permanent responsibility towards all the aspects of the question of Palestine until it is resolved in a satisfactory manner, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions and in accordance with international legitimacy, and until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are fully realized. Today, the supporting role of the United Nations in the peace process is even more crucial and needed than ever. The United Nations should remain the guardian of international legitimacy and play a key role in mobilizing international assistance for development, as an important underpinning of the peace process. The Committee believes that the United Nations should continue to maintain its responsibility towards the question of Palestine and the Palestinian people until the end of the implementation period, so that a final agreement could be legitimized and complemented, as necessary. In this regard, the Committee shares the view that the important work carried out by UNRWA should be continued. The Committee also supports the view that the reactivation of the work of the UNCCP, established by the General Assembly in its resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948, and the use of the records of the Commission related to land ownership in Palestine should be considered. For its part, as the organ of the General

Assembly established to deal with the question of Palestine, the Committee pledges to continue its work aimed at mobilizing the international community as a whole, at the governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental levels, in support of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the question of Palestine, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

89. In the course of the past year, the Committee has worked towards heightening international awareness of the question of Palestine and the urgency of making it possible for the Palestinian people to exercise its inalienable rights. It has also continued its programme of meetings in the various regions and cooperated with the NGO community in order to make the programme more effective and useful. The Committee intends to continue to review and assess its programme of activities with a view to making it more focused and responsive to the developments in the peace process and on the ground. In its programme of work for the next year, the Committee will continue to focus on the question of the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, permanent status issues, as well as Palestinian nation- and institution-building and social and economic development.

90. The Committee, in its future activities, intends to continue to promote the Bethlehem 2000 Project of the Palestinian Authority. It is of the view that this important undertaking will require sustained international support not only for the period of the millennial celebrations in Bethlehem, but also long after the celebrations come to a close. Moreover, the Committee wishes to draw the attention of the international community to the urgency of providing varied assistance to many other Palestinian municipalities throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

91. The Committee recognizes the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat in support of the Committee's objectives and requests it to continue its programme of publications and other informational activities. This would include the updating of UNISPAL on a day-to-day basis with relevant documents available in electronic form and the completion of work on UNISPAL's collection of documents hitherto unavailable in machine-readable form.

92. The Committee is of the view that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information has remained an important and useful tool in informing the media and public opinion on issues relating to the question of Palestine. The Committee considers that the programme should be continued with the necessary flexibility, as required by developments affecting the question of Palestine.

93. In an effort to make its contribution to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, the Committee calls upon all States to join in this endeavour and invites the General Assembly once again to recognize the importance of its role and to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-first Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/31/35).

[2] Ibid., *Thirty-second Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/32/35); ibid., *Thirty-third Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/33/35); ibid., *Thirty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/34/35 and Corr.1); ibid., *Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/35/35); ibid., *Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/36/35); ibid., *Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/37/35 and Corr.1); ibid., *Thirty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/38/35); ibid., *Thirty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/39/35); ibid., *Fortieth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/40/35); ibid., *Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/41/35); ibid., *Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/42/35); ibid., *Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/43/35); ibid., *Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/44/35); ibid., *Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/45/35); ibid., *Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/46/35); ibid., *Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/47/35); ibid., *Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/48/35); ibid., *Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/49/35); ibid., *Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/50/35); ibid., *Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/51/35), ibid., *Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/52/35); ibid., *Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/53/35); and ibid., *Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/54/35).

[3] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 75, No. 973.

[4] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/54/35), chap. VII.

[5] Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 47/1 of 22 September 1992, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia did not participate in the work of the Committee.

[6] A/AC.183/2000/CRP.1.

[7] The observers at the Committee meetings were as follows: Algeria, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, China, Ecuador, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mauritania, Morocco, Nicaragua, Niger, Qatar, Sri Lanka, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates, Viet Nam, League of Arab States, Organization of the Islamic Conference and Palestine.

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